

# Warm Night, Dark Highway... What the #\*%@ Is That?

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VFA-106

After six months and 4,000 miles of mishap-free motorcycle riding, I felt comfortable I could handle any situation that might arise on the road. I'd been practicing everything I had learned in the motorcycle-safety course. I was wearing long-sleeve attire, full-face helmet, long pants, gloves, and high-top boots, presumably in full compliance with PPE requirements. I also was adhering to the posted speed limits at all times.

One quiet night on a dark highway in early January, though, with the Mid-Atlantic air temperature well above normal, I was enjoying my riding experience more than usual. Suddenly, out of nowhere, everything came to a violent, frightening halt. I lost control of my motorcycle because of what first appeared to be a massive, brown cow trotting into my path on the highway at an amazing speed. After swerving hard and barely missing the obstruction, which turned out to be a deer, I crashed knees-first onto the interstate.

I then found myself skidding on my lower back and forearms for what seemed like a few hundred feet. The experience was something that never could have been predicted or explained. While I was sliding down the highway, at a high rate of speed, my instincts told me to resist rolling. When I finally stopped, I jumped up and ran off to the side of the road to avoid the traffic following closely behind.

An assessment of the damage to the motorcycle made it look safe for me to continue my ride home. With the help of a good Samaritan, who happened to be passing by, I managed to bend back a piece of the motorcycle that had lodged in the steering column. I didn't feel my injuries required a visit to the local emergency room. After all, I was more concerned with my gnarly case of road rash than the minor bruises to my left knee and right wrist, and even the road rash didn't look too bad. The next day, however, I succumbed to the pain of the road rash and visited medical personnel, who carefully scrubbed the remaining skin from my forearms and lower back.

I learned some things from this experience:

- Leathers aren't just a style or a look; they prevent severe burns from road rash.
- The sweater I was wearing, while stylish and trendy, didn't provide much protection for my arms.
- And while I was lucky no other vehicles or people were involved, I learned that liability insurance has its shortcomings. It's useful (and required) but didn't do my trashed motorcycle any good at all.

As I look back on what my options were, instead of slipping and sliding on the highway and getting the scrapes and burns, I could have taken the advice of my mother and just sold the motorcycle. The leather-jacket option, though, is more feasible because I like riding too much. Also, I need to remember the posted speed limit is for the best road conditions; when it's dark out, I need to slow down and give myself more reaction time.

In a few months, I'll be fully recovered, and my motorcycle will be ready to ride again. By the way, the deer that jumped into my path got away unharmed and running like a bandit. It's almost like he had planned the whole thing. **S**

*The author was assigned to VFA-136 when he wrote this story.*

## Resources:

- Down a Different Road, <http://www.931arg.afrc.af.mil/news/storyprint.asp?id=123068576>
- Critter Crashes: How to Avoid Deer and Other Animals on a Motorcycle, [http://www.motorcyclecruiser.com/streetsurvival/preventing\\_fatal\\_deer\\_accidents/](http://www.motorcyclecruiser.com/streetsurvival/preventing_fatal_deer_accidents/)
- How to Handle Animals on the Road While Riding a Motorcycle, [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_7884\\_handle-animals-road.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_7884_handle-animals-road.html)